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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS AND REPORTS OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS AND REPRESENTATIVES

Letter dated 22 June 1994 from the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of an appeal made by the Catholic bishops of the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (see annex).

I would be grateful for your kind assistance in circulating the present letter and its annex as an official document of the General Assembly under items 103 and 104 (c) of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Mario NOBILO
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/49/50/Rev.1.

ANNEX

Appeal made at Zagreb on 9 June 1994 by the Catholic bishops of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina following a joint meeting on 7 and 8 June 1994

We have already on several occasions presented our concern and calls to the world public in the name of all who suffer and in the name of the people without rights in our dioceses. Once again we raise our voice, determined to defend human and civil rights and the freedom of all our believers and all other peoples without rights.

In particular, we wish to alert the domestic and world public, all the Bishops' Conferences of Europe and the world and all other ecclesiastical institutions, humanitarian organizations, as well as all State and political forums of the increasingly dramatic situation of Catholics living on the occupied territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia.

It is a bitter and painful fact that, before the very eyes of Christian and democratic Europe, three Catholic dioceses are being destroyed: Banja Luka, Sarajevo and Trebinje. Innocent and unprotected members of the Catholic Church are suffering the worst humiliations, prosecutions and very often murders. They are without elementary human rights and freedoms, surrendered to the force of outlaws and to the terror of persecutors. They are forced to leave the homes where they lived for centuries and to go elsewhere, most often to uncertainty.

Before the start of the war in 1991, Vrhbosna, the Archdiocese of Sarajevo, had 528,000 Catholics among its 144 parishes. In this war, about 350,000 have been expelled by force, 45 per cent of the churches have been destroyed and 30 per cent heavily damaged. The remaining believers live under pressure and in great uncertainty.

In the diocese of Mostar-Duvno and Trebinje-Mrkan, out of the pre-war population of 210,000 Catholics, 25,000 have been expelled and the major part of the diocese is inaccessible. Over 40 churches and church buildings have been destroyed or damaged.

The diocese of Banja Luka, which had 110,000 Catholics before the war, is in real danger of having religious life completely destroyed in four fifths of its territory. Fifty per cent of the churches and other religious objects had already been destroyed, 45 per cent of the remaining churches and religious objects are heavily damaged to a greater or lesser degree and three quarters of the believers have been expelled by force or left to fend for themselves. Catholics are being expelled in spite of the fact that there was no fighting on this territory and that Catholics behaved peaceably during the whole period of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

If this terror is not stopped, the above-mentioned dioceses will be destroyed. Their history in Bosnia and Herzegovina goes back a thousand years.

The same thing will happen in the parts of the dioceses located on the territory of the Republic of Croatia, where it is forbidden for bishops to visit parishes and where 115 parishes have been destroyed and devastated, and 245,000 Catholics expelled, together with their priests, friars and nuns.

We invite all of you to raise your voices, finally to put a stop to lawlessness, cruelty and devastation and to help correct injustice.

We hope that hundreds of millions of Catholics and other Christians, united in prayer and Christian solidarity, will find a way to reach the most important international instances, so that a united Europe could remove this terrible moral disgrace from itself.

We shall intervene without respite for dignity and in the defence of the human and civil rights of nations, minorities and other people, for the achievement of a just peace, which signifies the right of all refugees to return to their homes and the right to lead the dignified life of civilized men.

We thank all the benefactors and all others who have helped us bear all these sufferings.

Franjo Cardinal KUHARIĆ
Archbishop of Zagreb and
President of the Croatian Bishops' Conference

Mons. Vinko PULJIĆ
Archbishop of Vrhbosna